

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

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WHAT I HAVE OBSERVED ON MY BLOCK

By Emma Woods.

On my block of land near the pine forest there are lots of birds and plants. I don't know very much about plants, but I have taken an interest in the birds.

Everyday I always see Flame Robins, female and male. These are beautiful little birds with dark feathers and a brilliant orange breast. The female hasn't such dark feathers and not a very bright breast. I always see these birds sitting on fence posts concentrating on the

ground for worms or grubs and insects. They don't seem very frightened of me if I quietly watch them.

The other common bird I always observe is the Superb Blue Wren. The male has a beautiful bright blue breast and some stripes at the back. I was disappointed in the female's colour compared to the male. The female is a plain brown. I always see the pair of these birds, never a male separate or a female separate. Also I see groups of them all together.

Silver Eyes are some other birds that I have seen as well. I find these birds very hard to observe because they move so quickly. By the time I get my binoculars out they have gone. Even without getting binoculars out I find it hard to keep up with them. They have a white stripe near each eye and they are a murky green colour. They seem to like the coffee bush and low shrubs and bushes to fly to.

On my block there is a dam. I have observed the Mountain Duck and other wild ducks. The water bird I found interesting was the Little Grebe. This bird is very small, with a little white splash of a dot under one eye. The rest of it is a brown colour. While I was looking at it, it suddenly disappeared under the water. I thought it would never come up again. Finally it did, where I least expected it to. That day I saw a pair of them. I have also seen a black Cormorant. It spent a couple of days on the dam eating leeches, which was good. Other birds that I have seen are the Wood Duck, White Faced Heron, Plovers and White Ibis.

During the Winter (now) I have observed the Yellow Eastern Robin. These birds are very tame and come right up to me. I was sitting with my friend in our orchard area and this Robin was on the tree only a metre away. The Yellow Eastern Robin has a bright yellow breast and a grey body. They spend a lot of time looking at the ground for grubs and insects.

During Spring I have noticed a lovely bird, the Spotted Pardalote. Actually I see these birds in flocks, skimming over the Coffee Bush. These are very pretty birds with a colourful tail and spots. They move very fast and keep under cover.

Well, they are just about all the birds I have seen. I have seen some parrots and Galahs, but I don't know much about them.

It is hard to get the right colours of each sort to look up in the bird book.

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Emma, who lives with her parents and sister near the entrance to the old Barkers Creek pine plantation, just near the burnt area where the Club has been on excursions a couple of times, is in an almost ideal area for her to learn about birds, using the binoculars which she bought with her own pocket money after months of saving. She is a student at the High School.

1982 Australian Bird Call Imitation Championship

An entry sheet was received for the above from the sponsors, Maryborough F.N.C.

The competition carries \$500 prize money, a Trophy and Perpetual Trophy.

Please see me if you are interested.

Entries close on Aug 25 and the Competition is held on Aug 28 at 8pm at Salvation Army Hall, Maryborough.

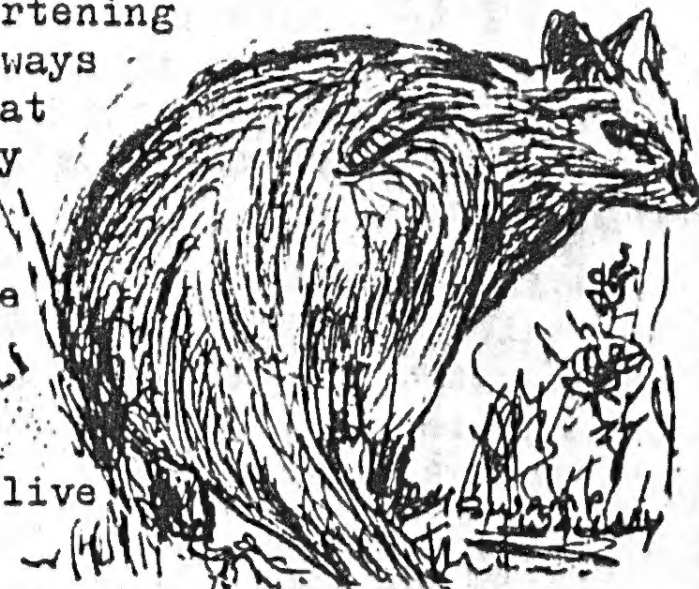
WILDLIFE CASTLEMARINE

Do we in our eagerness to study and record plants and birds of this locality tend to forget the larger members of our wildlife such as Kangaroos, Wallabies, Echidnas, etc.?

The Kangaroos and Wallabies have a rather hazardous existence with every young man both local and visitors who own a gun declaring them fair game along with the rabbits, foxes and ducks. Protection by law does not help much out of sight in the scrub. My sighting of Kangaroos over the last 12 years was heartening up to about three years ago. I could always find a small colony near a certain hill at Irishtown, another larger one near a tiny waterhole down Hunter's rack off Ridge Road. Also, early in the 70's one Kangaroo and one black Wallaby seemed to hide out back of the Cemetery at Campbells Creek, but since we heard shots in that direction they have vanished.

Another large Black Wallaby seemed to live in the scrub east of Taradale.

As for Echidnas, four years ago one wandered near our house; and we have seen areas where they have scratched around along the area of Ridge Road. Perhaps we could make an effort and try and see what large animal life does exist in the forests around Castlemarine. We might be surprised.



Terry Collins

NEW BIRD FOR BARKERS CREEK LIST

During June a party of 4 or 5 small birds, new to us, came onto our bird-table. It was clear that they were honeyeaters of some kind, roughly 6" in length.

As they jostled, drinking and splashing in the water-dish, we had ample time to study them, and later to look for them in our bird books where we were able to identify them as Black-chinned Honeyeaters.

Wyn Palmer.

At the Business meeting there was a verbal report from the Grants, who live only a Kilometre or so from Palmers, that they had seen the Black-chinned Honeyeaters a week or two ago.

From the Committee

At the request of the Festival Committee for the Club to contribute to the Festival Program it was decided to hold another Wildflower Tour to Muckleford Forest.

LITTLE RIVER ABORIGINAL BORA GROUND

During the Ocean Grove Camp-out we visited the You Yangs, and then continued some miles to the north-west, to see "The Magic Circle". The Circle is a pointed oval of basalt rocks, carefully chosen and sited with the narrow end to the east. It measures 150 metres around the perimeter. The stones have been placed with the flat sides facing into the circle. One hundred and forty stones, each weighing from 100 to 300 pounds were used.

The circle lies on a sloping hill-side above the deeply carved bed of a tributary of the Little River. Just above the stream and deep water-hole is an outcropping of great basalt boulders that could have provided shelter for tribal people. Across the stream one high rock-face is still smoke blackened from the cooking fires.

It is said that this was the site for lessons in manhood, and the initiation rites of the aboriginal people of the area. Presumably the old men and the young would have left their tribe in the sheltered valleys of the You Yangs while they attended to the solemn mysteries of manhood.

I felt them there, and the following poem resulted.

THE STONES CRY OUT.

How was it there
In the place of the ancient stones
When the world was young?
Dark bodies flashed
And laughter hung
On the air,
Delicate as cobweb.
The pool, mysterious and deep,
Gave life. And under sky's impartial dome
The warm, grey walls of rock
Were sheltering home.

And there, on the hill above,
A check to the mind's free run,
The awesome, terrible stones were placed
To point to the rising sun.

Within that circle the wise ones laid
To shrinking flesh the keen stone blade.
What agony, and fortitude..... denied
By surging joy and singing pride
When a man was made.

Lost and bewildered now
Stand the sacred stones
In an alien time.
Their glory has departed.
Reeds fill the pool, and slime
Encrusts the ugly litter
Of a stranger race,
Cold-eyed and greedy-hearted.

But, ah! the very stones cry out:
Approach with grief and fear.
Is it rustling wind
Through the dry reed-bed
Or a clamour of voices we hear?
The dead still speak, while the stones remain,
Of inhuman deeds and inflicted pain.
We breathe the air that gave them breath.....
We are diminished by their death.

MALLEE FOWL

Audrey Bruton

As Don Walker said in his vote of thanks to the speaker, Graham Saunders managed to take us, just for an hour, right into the world of the Mallee and the Mallee Fowl with his slides which accompanied his talk last month.

Graham was in Hopetown for 5 years, and spent many days at Waith, a special reserve near Hopetown, looking for, then watching, the Mallee fowl.

At one time the Mallee Fowl was in danger of extinction, but there are now large areas where it is able to breed, including the Big Desert and Wyperfeld National Parks.

An old farmer who had watched Mallee Fowl for 60 years was Graham's guide and mentor. Alex, as he called the farmer, tried incubating the eggs at one time, with success, incase this might be needed in order to save the birds from extinction.

Graham said that the birds were beautifully marked, and about the size of a small turkey. They are perfectly camouflaged, as his slides illustrated very clearly, and it took him 18 months before he saw one, though they were around. They are not afraid, and just walk quietly away from a watcher, seldom taking to the air. They lose all shyness in the breeding season.

Their food is generally berries and seeds, particularly wattle seeds, and the mounds are where there is plenty of

this feed available, as the male never goes far from the mound while he is working it.

The male tends the mound for 10 months of the year, and rakes up the litter for up to 200 yards around to place in the open mound. This is left 'til there is rain, and is then raked over and covered with sand and allowed to rot, thus producing the heat required for incubation.

The male continually works the mound, and when it is ready to receive the eggs, about September, the hen, now ready to lay, arrives at the mound. The male opens up the mound and both birds test the temperature, apparently with open beak and tongue. She will lay only when she is satisfied, although sometimes the male, who croons and 'talks' the whole time, will give her a 'hurry up'. She will lay up to 33 eggs during a season, the last being laid about February.

If there is no rain the birds don't breed.

The male keeps the mound at the right temperature, testing it with his beak, daily opening it, or putting more material on it as required to keep the nesting chamber at 33°C.

When the chicks hatch they have to struggle up through the mound, which is kept loose by the male's activity, and are independent right from the start. The parents ignore them completely. There is, needless to say, a high mortality rate.

Pied Currawongs and goannas steal the eggs, and foxes and goannas take the young.

Several mounds are used by a breeding pair, more or less in rotation. Some old ones are reported to be as much as 70 feet across and 4½ feet high.

This is an extract from an old book, "Australian Native Plants", in a chapter on "Timbers", given to me by Stan Bruton. Ed.

'The Wattle Goat-moth. *Zeuzera* (*Eudoxyla*) *Eucalypti* (sic.) (Boisd. Herr. Schaef.)

'The following notes respecting this insect are entirely taken from Professor McCoy's "Prodromus of the Zoology of Victoria," Decadeiii., where (Plate 30) a coloured plate illustrating its life history is given.

'Considering the great importance attached by the Government to the preservation and cultivation of wattle trees (*Acacia*), it

industry, to know the appearance of the insect represented on the plate (above alluded to) as the great destroyer of these trees, so that attention may be given to destroying the perfect moth; the large abdomen of the female of which is distended with millions of eggs, each of which will produce a voracious grub as thick as one's thumb, and five or six inches long, eating the timber for years.

'It is unfortunate that the specific name *Eucalypti* should have been given to this species, as it never frequents any *Eucalyptus*, but feeds exclusively on the wood of *Acacias*.

'The larva, hatched from eggs laid in crevices of the bark of the branches, works steadily into the interior of the tree, proceeding head downwards, enlarging the cylindrical burrows as it gradually grows larger and eats its way downwards, often reaching to the roots. When about to assume the pupa state it forms a slight cylindrical cocoon from four inches to a foot long, of silk and sawdust-like small grains of wood, as a lining to the ends of its burrow. When the burrow terminates in a root a few inches below the surface of the ground, the cocoon is continued from the hole in the wood upwards as far as close to the surface of the ground; but when the burrow ends on the surface of the trunk of the tree above ground level there is no prolongation of the cocoon. In either case the pupa works itself forward by means of little deflected spines on the rings, pushing for half-an-inch or so through the end of the cocoon before it bursts to allow the imago to escape.

'The ovipositor of the females is of extraordinary length and rigidity, equalling half the length of the abdomen when exerted, but capable of being entirely retracted out of sight; with this eggs are deposited deep in the crevices or fissures of the bark of the trees, on the inner timber of which the larva feeds.

'It is common in the winged state about February, flying in the twilight, in all parts where wattle trees abound.

'In most forest-bearing countries the natural enemies of the larvae, and protectors of the trees, are woodpeckers, who by instinct know where the larvae are, and by powerful strokes of their bills cut down quickly on them through the sound wood, and transfixing the grubs with their long wormlike, barbed tongue, draw them out, and devour them. In Australia there are no woodpeckers, and the consequence is that every tree cut up for firewood is seen to be traversed with large cylindrical canals made by these or allied larvae, which are the greatest destroyers of our forests, so abounding in the wood of almost every forest tree that, in a storm, it is dangerous to go near a large tree, as one apparently sound may snap across unexpectedly with a moderate wind.

CLUB PROGRAMME

MEETINGS

Friday Aug 13

Rev. Colin Burt, Birds of America.

Thursday Aug 26 7.30pm

Business meeting

Friday Sept 10

"Parsonic Perambulations" - a wander around Katamatite with the Elliott family.

Thursday Sept 23

Business meeting

Friday Oct 8

Mr Doug Stevenson,
A Forestry Officer in Victoria

Thursday Oct 28

Business meeting

Meetings are held in the Education Centre, Mostyn St. (in the S.E.C. building) at 8pm.

Outings are usually held on the Saturday following the meeting, leaving the Ed. Centre at 1.30pm sharp.

Business meetings, held in the Ed. Centre at 7.30pm on the 4th Thursday each month, are open to any members who wish to attend.

OUTINGS Leave Ed. Centre at 1.30pm

Saturday Aug 14

Geology, Leader Clive Willman

Saturday Sept 11

Werona (out Yandoit/Campbelltown way - map next month) Leaders Geoff Sitch and Frank Blake.

MONDAY Sept 20

Showday walk, an all day walk with picnic or barbeque lunch.

Venue for this year will be Porcupine Ridge. Details to be finalized.

Sunday Oct 3

Fryers Ridge. Joint excursion with Bendigo F.N.C.

Meet at Market at 10.30 am

Sunday Oct 17

Stuart Mill with Maryborough F.N.C.

Sat-Sun Oct 23 & 24 W.V.F.N.C.A.

Campout at Creswick, hosted by the Creswick club. This will be our official Club outing for October.

Saturday Nov 13

Lyal Glen, Leader Mr Jack Kellham of Bendigo F.N.C.

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON OUTINGS

The Wednesday outings conducted by the Club throughout the Spring months commence on the 1st September.

They commence at 4.30pm and last for about an hour.

Wednesday Sept 1

Wildlife along the railway line. Leader Rita Mills. Leave from 118 Blakeley Rd, at 4.30pm.

Wednesday Sept 8

Harcourt Reserve. Leader Frank Blake. Leave from Foundry Band Rooms, at 4.30pm.